

Meeting Summary

EPA Region 6 Deputy Regional Administrator Visit to Crossett, Arkansas

Background

DRA Sam Coleman and staff from OEJTA visited Crossett, AR, on February 22, 2014. The purpose of the visit was to participate in a tour of the community and a community meeting at the request of Pastor David Bouie, Sr. Pastor Bouie represents the local group Concerned Citizens for Environmental Justice (CCEJ). The group is concerned about air emissions, water discharges, and other issues related to the Georgia Pacific LLC paper facility (GP) in Crossett. A film crew from Penn Road Productions took video of the community tour and meeting. Staff from the production company also worked on a 2011 documentary that focused on the community and their concerns with GP.

Community Concerns

Concerns expressed by community members during the visit included the following.

1. **Air emissions.** Ouachita Riverkeeper Inc. conducted air sampling in Crossett on behalf of CCEJ in 2012. According to their preliminary report and laboratory analysis, they found significant quantities of hydrogen sulfide gas in the neighborhoods surrounding the GP facility. Residents are concerned about the constant, strong odors throughout the community. Several indicated suffering from some kind of respiratory condition.
2. **Drinking water contamination.** Drinking water sampling was also conducted by Ouachita Riverkeeper Inc. in Crossett in 2012. Their report states that they found acetone, benzene, bromoform, dibromochloromethane, diethyl phthalate, phenol, tertiary-butylmethylether (MTBE), and zinc in the city's drinking water.
3. **Groundwater contamination.** Additional sampling of groundwater and private wells by Ouachita Riverkeeper Inc. found phenol and other chemicals.
4. **Improper disposal of hazardous materials.** Residents are concerned the facility is burying hazardous materials on its various properties and within the community. Former GP employees stated they participated in or may have observed improper dumping of hazardous materials while employed at the facility. A former employee also stated he had participated in the killing of fish in Mossy Lake and the subsequent burial of the fish on GP property. Resident Ken Atkins stated that he buried "environmentally friendly" waste from GP on his property from approximately 1999 to 2012. Mr. Atkins said he later learned that the waste was hazardous. He requested that GP and ADEQ conduct sampling on his property. No sampling has been done.
5. **Long-term exposure to hazardous chemicals.** Residents spoke of having decades of direct access to the GP wastewater system canals and Coffee Creek while growing up and living in Crossett and not realizing that they were being exposed to harmful

chemicals. Residents believe there is a higher rate of cancer in the community due to long-term exposure to chemicals from the GP facility. Resident Earnest Smith asserted his belief that his 10-year-old daughter's cancer is the result of such exposure. A former GP employee also spoke of being exposed to elevated levels of hydrogen sulfide while employed at the facility. The employee stated that GP managers were told of the elevated levels and did not take proper action.

6. **Lack of responsiveness.** Community members believe local officials, ADEQ, and GP are not responsive to their concerns. Pastor Bouie also stated previously that local officials and GP do not provide the community with information when there is an incident or release related to the facility.
7. **Lack of access to community cemetery.** Community members asserted that GP is denying them access to a local cemetery that is located near the facility.
8. **Lack of access to county roads.** Community members stated several county roads have been blocked off by GP. One of the roads cited is Thurman Road, which they contend leads to an illegal dump site. The film crew stated they had video footage of the dump site and would share it with EPA.
9. **Wildlife contamination.** Residents assert that there are still fish and other aquatic life in Coffee Creek and Mossy Lake. Some indicated they had caught fish in the creek and lake for years and did not know they were not supposed to fish there. Some residents may still fish in the lake. Residents also said they have observed deformed deer and deer with growths in the community.

EPA Region 6 Commitments

DRA Sam Coleman made the following commitments to the community during the visit.

1. Region 6 will obtain a copy of the drinking water Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) for Crossett, AR. The CCR summarizes information regarding sources used (i.e., rivers, lakes, reservoirs, or aquifers) any detected contaminants, compliance and educational information.
2. Region 6 will participate in another community meeting with representatives from ADEQ and GP to provide information and discuss facility operations.

Other Items of Note:

1. Ms. Cheryl Slavant of Ouachita Riverkeeper Inc. stated she felt like the report and data submitted to EPA Region 6 was "ridiculed."
2. More information on Penn Road Productions and the 2011 documentary on Crossett and GP can be found at the following web sites.
 - <http://www.crossettdocumentary.com/#>
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=KZWAQ_3y0j8